

Odyssey Reading Guide

Book 1: Athena Visits Telemachus

How do Athena and Zeus take advantage of Poseidon being away from Olympus?

Athena appears to Telemachus in the form of Mentos. What does she tell Telemachus to do? To what end does Athena share the story of Prince Orestes? How is he Telemachus' foil character?

Describe the suitors. Note an example of specific bad behavior and who's doing it.

Identify:

Aegisthus

Clytemnestra ("Atrides' wife")

Agamemnon

Orestes

Mentos

Nestor

Menelaus

Antinous

Eurymachus

Eurykleia

Book 2: The Debate in Ithaca (summary)

Telemachus calls of the Council in the marketplace to announce he will go in search of his father. Antinous tells about how Penelope delayed choosing a new husband for three years by using a deception: she pretended to weave a shroud for her father-in-law's burial but secretly undid the weaving at night. Despite signs sent by Zeus through the flight of an eagle, the suitors Antinous and Eurymachus boldly insult Telemachus as they declare it is Penelope who is leading them on, and they demand she is forced to marry.

Telemachus tells his nurse Eurykleia of his plan to travel, but hides it from his mother, Penelope (she is his guardian of the threshold). Athena continues to help out Telemachus, either as herself, in disguise as Telemachus, or in the disguise of Mentor, another family friend.

BOOK 3: Telemachus with Nestor (summary + short reading)

Telemachus meets Nestor's son and Nestor, who shares many stories of Odysseus during the Trojan War. The details of the murder of Agamemnon by Aegisthus is told to Telemachus by Nestor, as it will be again by Menelaus later. **(Read these lines to get this central story: 193-209, 253-316)** Orestes (son of Agamemnon) is an important foil character to Telemachus.

How does Telemachus compare to Orestes?

How does Penelope compare to Clytemnestra?

BOOK 4: Menelaus and Helen

What do we learn about Greek hospitality customs from this encounter?

Helen is the first to publicly recognize Telemachus. Compare her here to our discussion of her role in Trojan War.

Menelaus tells about Proteus, Old Man of the Sea. What is the news of Odysseus? How is Telemachus affected?

Back at home in Ithaca, the suitors learn too late about Telemachus's journey. What is Antinous's plot?

How does Penelope react when she learns that Telemachus is away on a journey? Consider a link with the hero cycle.

Identify:
Mentor

Nestor

Menelaus

Book 5, 6, 7, 8: Calypso; Nausicaa; The Palace of Alcinous; The Phaeacian Games (summary)

Hermes journeys to Calypso's island to inform her she must release Odysseus. Calypso wanted to make Odysseus her husband, and therefore immortal, but he refused because he longed to return to his family and kingdom.

Many gods work for and against Odysseus as he journeys away from Calypso's island on a raft.

Odysseus is washed up on the island of Phaeacia, where the Princess Nausicaa discovers him and helps him find his way to her home, where the king, Alcinous, meets with him. Odysseus is received warmly as an anonymous guest.

Alcinous fulfills his promise to gather together the lords and princes of Phaeacia to give Odysseus a promising send-off. They elect 52 men to crew a special boat whose only job is to return Odysseus (who still hasn't been asked to identify himself) to his homeland. Everyone brings the stranger (they STILL don't know it's Odysseus) fine gifts and the minstrel sings a song about the Trojan Horse. Odysseus starts to weep at the memory of those that died, and Alcinous finally asks:

"Tell me what name you go by at home, what your mother and father call you, and the people of your town, and your neighbors all around. No one on the whole world is without a name, high or low...Tell me your country and people, and your city, that our ships may aim at the right place in their minds...tell me all about your travels, what countries you have visited, what cities of civilized men."

And AT LAST, Odysseus tells about his almost ten year voyage on his way back from Troy....

Books 9: The Cyclops

Odysseus begins to tell his story to the Phaeacians. For each stop, record WHAT happened and what MORAL LESSON that stop shows.

1. Ismaros of Ciconians
2. Lotus-eaters
3. Country of the Cyclops (men want to leave right away)

How is this book different from the rest of the story? Consider the way the story is told, the kinds of events that happen in them, the point of view, the tone or pace of the stories...

Identify:

Polyphemus

“Nobody”

Book 10: Circe

Record WHAT happened and what MORAL LESSON that stop shows.

4. Island of Aeolia (stays one month)
5. Can see Ithaca, but blown back to Aeolia
6. Laestrygonians
7. Circe (Aeaea) (stays one year)

Books 11: The Book of the Dead; Scylla and Charybdis

8. Kingdom of the Dead (to meet with Tiresias)
9. Back to Circe
10. Sirens
11. Scylla and Charybdis
12. Island of Helios (stays one month)
13. Calypso (stays seven years)
14. Phaeacians

Book 13, 14: Odysseus Lands in Ithaca; In Eumaeus' hut (summary)

The boat of the Phaeacians take Odysseus to Ithaca, but they put him (and all his treasures) ashore when he is asleep. [Poseidon punishes the Phaeacians for helping Odysseus by sinking their returning ship and turning it to stone.] He wakes and finds Athena who advises him to plan and plot instead of rushing home – remember Agamemnon!

Odysseus first goes to the home of Eumaeus, a swineherd loyal to him. Eumaeus receives the 'beggar' warmly, giving him whatever food and clothing he can afford. Eumaeus tells Odysseus the whole story of the suitors and how they've been treating everyone. Odysseus sleeps the night in Eumaeus' hut.

Book 15: Telemachus Returns

Athena visits Telemachus back at Menelaus' house - why? What does she warn him about?

Telemachus offers sanctuary to a runaway. Write down details of Theoclymenus's story.

Odysseus (still in disguise) tells Eumaeus his plan to get him close to the palace; what is it?

Telemachus finally arrives back in Ithaca, and the chapter ends with him heading toward Eumaeus' hut. How do you think the reunion between father and son might be?

Identify:

Eumaeus

Theoclymenus

Book 16: Odysseus Meets his Son

Remember Telemachus has never known his father, and Eumaeus has acted all these years as his only father figure. Describe the details of their reunion. (Odysseus is still in disguise)

Odysseus finally reveals his identity to Telemachus. Provide three specific details from the long-awaited meeting.

Odysseus lays out his plan for getting back at the suitors to Telemachus. What is it?

The suitors realize that Telemachus has gotten back safely and they plot again to murder him. How does the suitor Amphinomus respond to their plan?

Identify:

Amphinomus

Book 17: Odysseus Goes to the Town

First Telemachus returns home and is welcomed by Penelope, who asks him all about his voyage. What does Theoclymenus, the prophet, predict about Odysseus?

The scene cuts to Odysseus, making his way with Eumaeus back to Ithaca. They run into a goat herder, Melanthius. How does Melanthius treat Odysseus, who is disguised as a beggar?

When Odysseus finally arrives back home, he is treated poorly by the suitors. Which suitor stands out as being especially hostile to Odysseus, and what sorts of insults does he endure?

Identify:
Melanthius

Book 18: The Beggar in the Palace

Describe the fight between Odysseus and Irus.

What makes Amphinomus seem different than the rest of the suitors?

Of the people the reader meets at Odysseus's home, who is loyal to him and who isn't?

LOYAL

DISLOYAL

Identify:
Irus

Melantho

Book 19: Eurycleia Recognizes Odysseus

Contrast Melantho's response to Odysseus (still disguised as beggar) to Penelope's. What moral lesson is emphasized? Think about this scene – he's been away for twenty years! Does how he acts with her surprise you? Be specific.

As a token of her hospitality, Penelope offers to have a servant, Eurycleia, wash Odysseus's feet. What purpose does it serve to have Odysseus speak in disguise with Penelope or be recognized by Eurycleia? Consider how this episode in the story affects characterization, dramatic structure, pacing...

Penelope tells Odysseus of a contest among the suitors to determine which she will marry. What are the rules?

Book 20: Prelude to the Crisis

This chapter is the definition of rising action – the reader knows of the bloodshed to come, and so every piece of information is designed to put you in suspense about just how bad Odysseus's revenge will be. Who are two people who mistreat Odysseus (still disguised as a beggar) in his own home? What do they do?

1.

2.

This book is full of warnings sent to the people of Ithaca that Odysseus will soon return. What are three omens? How does one specific suitor respond?

1.

2.

3.

Identify:

Philoetius

Ctesippus

Book 21: The Great Bow

After going into the storerooms to find Odysseus's great bow (and telling the story of how he came to have the bow), Penelope brings it to the hall where all the suitors are waiting and tells them the conditions of the contest. Describe what happens as first Telemachus and then Leodes and the other men try to bend the bow.

Odysseus goes outside with Eumaeus (the swineherd) and Philoetius (the 'drover' who had spoken to Odysseus). Why does he choose to reveal his true identity to them at this time?

Odysseus (as beggar) asks for a chance to string the bow. After the suitors complain at his request but Penelope insists, Odysseus is at last given the bow; take note of what happens once he gets it.

Book 22: The Battle in the Hall

Who is the first suitor to die? Is this appropriate justice?

How does Eurymachus defend the suitors actions to Odysseus? Is this a reasonable point?

Odysseus and Telemachus begin the bloodbath. Provide three specific details.

List two punishments given to people other than suitors. Does this fit with the moral lessons offered by other parts of the book? Do these people deserve this punishment?

Book 23: Odysseus and Penelope

How does Penelope first respond to Eurycleia's news that Odysseus was back in the house?

What does Penelope tell Odysseus which is her test to be sure he is not an imposter?

Athena holds back the dawn so that Odysseus and Penelope can enjoy time together in bed for the first time in twenty years. What information does Odysseus tell Penelope there – especially about the journey Tiresias told him he must take now that he's back home?

Book 24: The Feud is Ended (summary)

The souls of the dead are lead to Hades, where they meet up with warriors from the Trojan War (including Achilles and Agamemnon). Amphimedon describes the fate of the suitors. Odysseus meets up with his father, Laertes, who tests his son's identity. Odysseus's greeting with other loyal followers in Ithaca is broken with Eupithes, Antinous's father, accuses Odysseus of disgrace. Others testify that this was the will of the gods who had been seen fighting by Odysseus's side in avenging wickedness. Battle breaks out, Eupithes is killed by Laertes, and Athena uses her power to bring peace.

Odyssey Synthesis Essay

Carefully read/view the following sources. Then synthesize material from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a well-developed essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies the following statement:

Odysseus's violent treatment of the suitors and disloyal servants is justified.

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Qualify

Based on what sources?

- ☐ Original text
- ☐ Movie
- ☐ Attic red figure skyphos
- ☐ Schwab engraving
- ☐ "The Suitor"
- ☐ *The Voyage of Penelope*

Break your big main idea down into three different subpoints to support your response to the prompt. Sequence the subpoints so that one leads to another, building momentum and bringing you to a clear statement of significance in the conclusion.

ODYSSEY SYNTHESIS RUBRIC

Original Thinking:

- ☐ Formulates a thesis in response to prompt, clearly supporting thesis with subpoints
- ☐ Analyzes the works in a significant, not superficial, way and avoids unnecessary plot summary

Support, Details, and Evidence:

- ☐ Uses sufficient detailed supporting examples and/or well-selected passages from at least three sources
- ☐ Uses correct parenthetical citations and includes MLA-formatted works-cited information

Organization and Clarity:

- ☐ Demonstrates structural unity (intro/body/conclusion, topic sentences, transitions) focusing on synthesis of ideas
- ☐ Demonstrates grammatical and mechanical accuracy; errors do not obscure meaning

Grading:

A Work surpasses some/all criteria, demonstrates superior thoughtfulness
B Work capably meets all criteria
C Work meets some of the criteria
D/F Criteria has not been met